Retourner à le Chat Chalet Car

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Retourner à le Chat Chalet Car

by cuddlesome

Summary

Simon ends up snowed in with Samantha. Again.

Notes

Simon's relationship with Samantha is FASCINATING. They are both horribly flawed people.

Translation notes for the French at the end.

See the end of the work for more notes

Simon is having a mental break. He seems to have one every time he sets foot in the cabin. The Cat watches on, waiting for him to calm down. It appears that it's going to be a long wait.

He hasn't been able to control his temper long enough to stop clomping around on the freshly-waxed floorboards with those horribly unfashionable shoes, and that was before he discovered they were snowed in. His hair is a mess after repeatedly dragging his fingers through it, not quite freeing it from the confines of his hairband but loosening it considerably. That ridiculous insignia across his face gets smeared at some point. He hasn't started taking his emotions out on the rest of the house yet, but if the results look anything like he does by the end she'll need to find a new cabin.

He even smells unstable. There's that nasty scent that seems to cling to every Apex member, body odor plus fast food plus overpriced soap and candles and graphic t-shirts, the smell of the mall that they've made their home, all topped off with lipstick. Simon is distinct from other members of the Apex in that he's horribly sweaty despite the attempt to mask it with Arctic Cowboy brand deodorant. She can pick out something more—acrylic paint, wood. He's keeping up with his old hobbies. She supposes they both are. That aside, those scents are all overlaid with the strong stench of panic. If he were in a car with any real predators he would attract them in an instant. The Cat sighs.

It's not that she doesn't understand his anxiety. She’s a living trigger for all of his fear of abandonment, of broken trust. Then there’s the ghom statue a couple of rooms over. Not one of her most sensitive pieces, that. And he seemed to truly believe that seeing Grace's memories would help them both. So she'd given him the materials he needed and helped him on his merry way like she was supposed to... only to have him get stopped at the front door.

How could such a thing have happened? (She knows, but she's not telling.)

“I was just out there." Between each shouted word he opens and slams the door to the cabin, revealing the impossibly tall wall of snow. “Where did all of it come from?”

She shrugs. "One of life’s great mysteries."

With a noise part groan and part growl he slams it a final time. He glances at her over his shoulder.

“Can we repeat what we did before?”

“No can do. That’s not Randall snow, it’s just your average, regular sort of snow. No way to call an armistice with Mother Nature.” As if anything on the train is natural. “Though, I suppose you could go attempt to have a chat with the clouds. I'll take a lot of delight in watching you try. Or..." She cycles a paw through the air. "...stay with me now... we could just wait it out like rational beings. *C’est simple comme bonjour*."

He's reaching a boiling point again. She can see it in his trembling shoulders, the fists he presses to the door.

"I think," she says carefully, "that your *copine* will be able to take care of herself during the brief time that you're delayed. She's very... capable. You needn't worry."

It pains her to compliment Grace, but at this point she'll say anything to get Simon to simmer down. It pains her even more to admit to herself that Grace deserves the flattery.

"But I..." He shakes his head. "She needs me."

"You don't sound so sure." She hadn't meant to sound so, well, catty, but it just slipped out.

Simon reacts with the level of decorum she has come to expect: none.

He whirls, leans down, and spits, “*Casse-toi*.”

Her ears flatten against her head but she does her best not to cower. She survived Amelia, a teenaged boy shouldn't be so intimidating. That aside, language! Had he learned that one

from her? She can’t imagine she would have lacked the self-censorship to say that around a child. Maybe he overheard her at poker night.

"I was simply stating facts," she says as he stomps by.

She can't help but notice he goes out of his way to avoid stepping on her tail. Interesting. She half expected him to try to punt her across the room.

He gets to the fireplace and starts pacing, arms crossed. "I'm getting back to Grace, right now, no matter what."

She pads after him. "Right. How do you plan to do that?"

"I don't know. I don't..."

Good heavens, he's crying. Simon has always been an ugly crier. That hasn't changed a bit. He starts mopping at his face with the sleeve of his hoodie.

The Cat hops up on the chair before the fire, tucks in her legs, and wraps her tail around herself in fluid motions. “Simon."

“What?”

She shuts her eyes. “I’m going to suggest something and you must promise me you won’t react in your usual way.”

“What?” He asks, somehow even more angrily.

She opens her eyes and clucks her tongue. “See, now, that is a lovely example of what not to do in reaction to my suggestion. So don’t do that.”

She gets a sullen face but no further response.

“*Mon petit*—mmh—" she gives his body a once-over; strange that physically he’s grown so much when his mind seems more childish than ever “—*mon grand*, have you ever heard of a therapy animal?”

He looks taken aback.

“Therapy animals? Like, at hospitals? My mom—” He cuts himself off and shakes his head. “Yeah. I’ve heard of them. Why?”

“Take a guess.”

“What, do you have a therapy animal in here that’ll somehow help Grace?”

One-track mind.

“Take another guess.”

She can see his frustration mounting. Then he laughs.

"What, you?"

"*Oui*. I happen to be certified."

He laughs a little harder as he continues to try to wipe away his tears.

She narrows her eyes. "Not for Grace, however. For you."

He pauses. "For me?"

She dips her head. “You’re very stressed. I wish to be of service.”

She watches emotions play out on his face. He's always been an open book. It made it easy to get him to tag along on heists as a child—she could see the guilt plain as can be if he ever turned her down. And she exploited it. Now the guilt went both ways.

"I don't need that," Simon says after finally schooling his expression to semi-composed. "I don't need or want to pet you to feel better. I'm not a little kid anymore."

She shakes her head, exasperated.

"What?"

"You desperately need it. But I suppose if you don't want to, I can't force you."

He scratches his chin, producing a bristling noise that's entirely unfamiliar as his nails scrape at the stubble. “What’s the catch?”

“No catch. I get something in exchange, after all: some affection. You'd be surprised how little I get pet these days." She flings a foreleg across her face. "*Très triste*."

He folds his arms. "No, actually, I'm not surprised."

She shakes her head, not removing her foreleg. "*Très, très triste*."

After some more pouting and protesting that she suspects is just for show, Simon actually agrees. He scoops her off of the chair she lays on, holding her at arm's length as though she's diseased. It's a pointless display since he ends up setting her down on his legs anyway. She doesn't like the lack of stability provided by his knee pads and crawls closer to his lap. She kneads and turns and kneads some more.

"Ow, ow, pelvis, pelvis—" Simon protests, grimacing. "Don't you dare step on my—"

"Wouldn't dream of it." She turns in one final circle and lays down.

They sit in silence broken up only by the snap of the fire and the hushed snowfall outside. Between her fur and the fire his upper legs must feel very warm indeed. He doesn't move.

"The thing about petting me," she says, "is that you actually have to pet me."

"I know."

He still doesn't pet her for another few minutes. Teenagers.

When he finally does, she almost startles. His hand covers almost the entirety of her torso. Gone were the plump digits of a human child. He starts to drag his fingers deep through her fur. Long, slim fingers, good for detail work with crafting. In another life he was probably suited to an equally delicate task; a violinist or sculptor. He didn't scar and callous them up with senseless violence.

He sets his other hand on top of her head, curling his fingertips down to scratch her jaw. Samantha's eyes drift half-shut. He moves both hands over her entire body, from her head to the tip of her tail, then repeats the motion. She can already sense that it's working: the tension

leaves his muscles and his strained breathing evens out. He notices the forms of petting she likes best and adjusts the movements of his hands accordingly. How considerate. She kneads his thigh and bumps her head against his fingers during some of the passes.

How many denizens has he ripped apart with these hands? How much blood wets them? She shudders to think. It occurs to her, not for the first time, that he could really hurt her if he wanted. Kill her, even. It seems hard to believe at the moment.

He smooths his palm over her head once more. She nuzzles into the touch. She purrs and flops onto her side against his abdomen, doesn't protest at all when he threads his fingers through the fur on her vulnerable belly. The Cat purrs deeper and louder. Her boy can't have completely lost his way yet.

His breathing turns shallow. Teardrops drip onto her right ear. She flicks them off and glances up at him.

“Samantha,” he whimpers, tears golden in the firelight. "I was so scared. I'm still scared."

He has switched entirely over to French, perhaps unconsciously. His Québécois accent always grated on her—*les shakes* is an absurd turn of phrase. Back when they were together, she spent some time trying to banish joual and all of its idiosyncrasies from his vocabulary. Now it’s just comforting to hear him speak to her without shouting.

"I loved you," he continues. "That's why it hurt so much when you left me."

"When I lost you," she corrects.

He curls his fingers into her belly fur, digging in like claws, then he releases her. "...yeah."

She rubs her cheek against his wrist, marking him with her scent. Even now, he's still her boy. Beneath his sleeve, his numbers tick down. She doesn't mention it. No telling what he'll do if

he thinks she's trying to "weaken" him or whatever nonsense the Apex espouse. Simon doesn't notice, too preoccupied with wiping away more tears.

This is the part where she should say she loved him too. Still loves him, in her way.

She hesitates. It'd be a shame to interrupt this lovely petting...

Say it, coward. So what if in her hundreds of years of living she's never once admitted to loving anyone but herself?

The Cat rolls back onto her front and sits up. "Simon—"

He switches back to English and the air of emotional vulnerability fades in an instant. "Don't. You don't have to lie for my sake. It's not your fault you got saddled with an unlovable passenger."

"*Chut!* Don't presume to know what I was going to say." She flicks her tail from side to side.

He raises his eyebrows and calls her bluff: "What were you going to say?"

"What I was going to say was..." She latches onto the first thing that comes to mind. "You love that girl too, yes?"

"More than anything." He starts petting her again, concentrating on her head and back.

"Be careful with her."

His hand stills just as quickly as he restarted. "What do you mean?"

"Weeeell," she says, sucking in a breath between her teeth, "you can be a bit, mm, possessive, *mon chaton*."

"So can you."

"Perhaps. But I tend to limit myself to things, not people, and you seem interested in expanding your collection." She waves a dismissive paw. "The point still stands. Don't grab the ladies too hard or they'll slip through your fingers. Oh, and Simon?"

"What?"

"*Mieux vaut être seul que mal accompagné*."

Simon harrumphs. "You would think that, wouldn't you?"

She can feel some of his former anger returning in the way that his core starts to go taut. Then he takes a deep breath and starts petting her head. She grins, fangy. He'll never admit that this event even happened after the fact. She'll enjoy it while she can. The snow shouldn't melt for a while. After all, she told Randall to take his time.

End Notes

Title means "Return to the Cat Chalet Car." I didn't translate "car" out of English just because I thought it read better and is the proper name of the place, haha.

I didn't literally translate the portion where Simon switches to speaking exclusively in French just because it would interrupt the flow (in a way that I hope that the other little bits of French don't).

C'est simple comme bonjour—French saying; literally "it's as simple as saying hello," essentially means "it's as simple as that"
Copine—girlfriend
Casse-toi—fuck off/piss off
Mon petit—my little guy
Mon grand—my big guy
Oui—yes
Très, très triste—very, very sad
Chut!—shh!
Mon chaton—my kitten
Mieux vaut être seul que mal accompagné—French saying; literally "Better to be alone than accompanied badly"

I headcanon that Simon is French Canadian whereas I think it's safe to say Samantha is canonically French in the European sense. Joual is Canadian French shaped by English influences. I made one overt, written out reference to it, "les shakes" as in "avoir les shakes" which means "having the shakes/being scared." I don't know if that phrase is 100% appropriate tonally because, alas, I am a German American doing her best, but there you have it.

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